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## CURRENT SUPPORT BRIEF

BULGARIA TO PRODUCE SYNTHETIC RUBBER

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND REPORTS

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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BULGARIA TO PRODUCE SYNTHETIC RUBBER

Bulgaria has recently announced plans to produce synthetic rubber, although Bulgaria is not among the list of Soviet Bloc countries designated in a CEMA resolution of December 1958 to be producers of this product. This important modification of Bloc plans for specialization in the chemical industry has not been explained, although Soviet approval must have been obtained. In view of the unsuccessful attempts by the Bloc to obtain US synthetic rubber technology, Bulgaria may be given access to a new but somewhat inferior Soviet process, which evidently is to be passed on to Rumania and Czechoslovakia and which apparently has been offered to Poland.

In February 1960 it was announced that the matter of synthetic rubber production in Bulgaria was under study. 1/ An article published in a Bulgarian regional newspaper in August 1960 indicated a synthetic rubber plant would be located near Burgas at the future site of a petrochemical complex and oil refinery. 2/ This report was confirmed in October 1960 by Tudor Zhivkov, head of the Bulgarian Communist Party, in the course of his visit to Cleveland, Ohio. 3/ Zhivkov gave no details beyond stating that petroleum imported by ship from the USSR would be used as the basic raw material, but it is fairly certain that the type of rubber to be produced will be butadiene-styrene or butadiene-methyl styrene and that the capacity of the plant will be at least 10,000 tons.

The plan for Bulgarian production of synthetic rubber represents a modification of the CEMA resolution of December 1958 on Bloc specialization in chemicals production. According to the resolution, Bulgaria was not designated to be a producer of synthetic rubber. The resolution stated that the USSR, East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Rumania would produce butadiene-styrene and butadiene-methyl styrene. 4/ To date the only producer other than the USSR and East Germany, which have both manufactured rubber for many years, is Poland, where production on a limited scale was begun in 1959. 5/ However, butadiene-styrene rubber plants are under construction in both Czechoslovakia 6/ and Rumania. 7/

There has been no indication of the reasons for the decision to begin synthetic rubber production in Bulgaria, although the project apparently has not been under consideration for long. Bulgaria was not among the five Eastern European Satellite countries represented at a meeting of the CEMA working group on synthetic rubber in November, 1959. 8/ However, as a petroleum refinery which will yield byproduct gases suitable as starting materials for rubber production is to be built near Burgas, and as plants with annual capacities as low as 10,000 tons are apparently feasible\*, there is no obvious reason why the decision was not based wholly on economic considerations. The Bulgarian plan parallels similar developments in several of the less industrialized countries of the West. Synthetic rubber plants have been proposed, or planned, or are under construction in Argentina, Brazil, India, Israel, and Mexico. 10/ In Hungary, the only Eastern European Satellite country other than Albania now without production or plans

\*Such a plant is now under construction in France. 9/

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for production of butadiene-styrene synthetic rubber, the latest official announcements on the subject state that the principle of "international specialization of labor" will be followed and that imports from CEMA partners will be relied on.\* 11/

Bulgarian technical and equipment-producing capabilities are wholly inadequate for this undertaking, therefore foreign assistance must be secured. Synthetic rubber technology in the Bloc is inferior by Western standards, but attempts made by the USSR, Poland, and Rumania to obtain the latest technology, which is controlled by US firms, have been unsuccessful. In view of the inability of the Bloc to obtain US technology, the Bulgarians may be given access to a new Soviet process--still inferior to the latest US process--which is being used in one Soviet plant and which is evidently to be used in the plant now under construction in Rumania, 13/ in the second section of the Czechoslovak plant, 14/ and which apparently has been offered to Poland for the projected petrochemical complex at Plock. 15/ Inasmuch as realization of the plan will require Soviet raw materials, technology, and equipment, it seems clear that this modification of the CEMA resolution had prior Soviet approval, although it may have been opposed by some of the more highly industrialized Satellite countries.

\*However, Hungary has recently announced plans to produce silicone rubber, a type with very specialized uses, again counter to the earlier CEMA resolution. 12/

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